

Joe Krebs



# Agile Kata



Patterns and Practices for  
Transformative Organizational Agility



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## Praise for *Agile Kata*

“Some of the great inventions come from putting seemingly disparate things together. Joe brought together scientific thinking, practiced through Kata, with Agile philosophies and methods and came up with something more powerful than either alone. Read this book and bring Agile to life!”

—Jeffrey Liker, author of *Toyota Way*

“*Agile Kata* draws on Joe Krebs’s decades of experience increasing companies’ ability to respond to continuous changes in the world and in the market. It’s a literal survival guide for companies navigating the uncertainty of a twenty-first century business environment.”

—Jeff Gothelf, coauthor of *Who Does What by How Much?*, *Sense & Respond*, and *Lean UX*

“Joe Krebs combines Agile methods with the scientific approach of Kata for continuous improvement in *Agile Kata*. As someone who has applied Toyota Kata in product management, I’ve seen firsthand how these practices help teams reflect, adjust, and become more effective—just as Agile principles encourage. This book offers practical guidance to help Agile teams do the same, making it an essential read for anyone looking to enhance their Agile practices.”

—Melissa Perri, CEO of Product Institute and author of *Escaping the Build Trap*

“The secret to success for business leaders is not in the application of tools but rather the thinking and human capability behind them. In *Agile Kata*, Joe Krebs has created an accessible, practical, and enjoyable leadership book that brings together the disciplines of scientific thinking, grounded in the routines (‘kata’) of problem-solving and coaching for improvement. *Agile Kata* provides the learning structure for any leader or Agile practitioner seeking to create sustainable impact through innovation and continuous improvement.”

—Katie Anderson, author of *Learning to Lead, Leading to Learn*

“If you’re like me, you’re a fan of Agile but also a fan of science; you’re a fan of patterns but also a fan of experiments; you’re a fan of learning but also a fan of joy. If so, you’re going to love *Agile Kata*.”

—Linda Rising, coauthor of *Fearless Change* and *More Fearless Change*

“Agile practices led us to new ways of working. *Agile Kata* will lead us to new ways of THINKING about new ways of working. In this book, author Joe Krebs takes us down time-honored paths to lead us to a new and joyful destination in our work lives.”

—Richard Sheridan, author of *Joy, Inc.: How We Built a Workplace People Love*

"With this book, Joe provides a fresh perspective on Agile. As continuous learning is at the heart of agility, Agile Kata are a great means to make this a practice. The great analogies and Joe's vast experience make this book particularly compelling."

—Jutta Eckstein, coauthor of *Company-wide Agility with BOSSA nova*

"I've been observing the Agile world moving from frameworks to more holistic patterns lately. To quote Joe, 'Kata are thinking models, not operating models... Kata are closer to a pattern that is applied, and something new and exciting emerges as a result of it! Joe's book is an incredibly important step in our Agile journey toward patterns-based approaches. I applaud him for writing it and encourage you to dive deeply into *Agile Kata*.'"

—Bob Galen, author and coach at Agile Moose

"Reading this book is a learning experience that enables you to nurture a learning culture for your own organization. The concepts and practical guidelines here explain how to use small experiments to build a foundation for continuous improvement. The Agile Kata approach fits any 'flavor' of modern software development."

—Lisa Crispin, consultant and coauthor of *Agile Testing* and *More Agile Testing*

"As an Agilist, I loved the original *Toyota Kata* books but struggled to grasp how to apply their powerful concepts outside manufacturing. This book—especially Joe's use cases—makes it easy to see how to use kata effectively in an Agile context."

—Fortune Buchholtz, enterprise coach

# AGILE KATA

PATTERNS AND PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE  
ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

JOE KREBS

 Addison-Wesley

Hoboken, New Jersey

Cover image: Agile Kata Pro; graphic by Jim Nuttle

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*Melanie:*

*Thank you for your endless support.*

*Megan, Charlotte, and Alexander:*

*It is a wonderful, imperfect world out there. Enjoy the experiments!*

*In Memoriam:*

*Ute*

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# Contents

- Foreword by Jeff Sutherland** ..... **xi**
- Foreword by Nigel Thurlow** ..... **xii**
- Preface** ..... **xiv**
- About the Author** ..... **xviii**
  
- Introduction** ..... **1**
  - Purpose, Background, and Goals ..... 1
  - Who Should Read this Book? ..... 4
  - How This Book Is Organized ..... 5
  - Challenges ..... 6
  
- Part I**    **Kata** ..... **9**
  - 1**    **Kata Mindset** ..... **11**
    - Kata Definition ..... 11
    - Habits ..... 12
    - Uncertainty ..... 16
    - Continuous Improvement ..... 19
    - Kata Culture ..... 20
  - 2**    **Improvement Kata** ..... **25**
    - Step 1: Understand the Direction or Challenge ..... 26
    - Step 2: Grasp the Current Condition ..... 27
    - Step 3: Establish the Next Target Condition ..... 29
    - Step 4: Experiment Toward the Target Condition ..... 31
    - Storyboard ..... 39
  - 3**    **Coaching Kata** ..... **43**
    - The Coach ..... 43
    - The Second Coach ..... 46



<b>Part II</b>	<b>Agile Kata</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Agile as Values and Principles</b>	<b>53</b>
	Definition of Agile	54
	Agile Manifesto	55
	Driving Change Using the Agile Manifesto, Even Outside of IT	57
	Spider Diagram	59
	Values and Principles Beyond the Agile Manifesto	60
	Traffic Light Indicator	61
	Conclusions: Connecting the Agile Manifesto and Agile Kata	63
<b>5</b>	<b>Measuring Value</b>	<b>65</b>
	Metrics for Management	66
	Metrics for Teams	67
	Value	68
<b>6</b>	<b>Agile Coaching</b>	<b>79</b>
	Coaching Outside of Business	80
	Learning to Learn	81
	Agile Coaching Competency Frameworks	83
	Role of an Agile Coach	85
	Professional Coaching	89
	Mentoring	91
	Teaching	93
	Change Agent	94
	Coaching Ethics	95
	Coaching Contract	96
	Agile Coaching Summary	96
<b>7</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>99</b>
	Goals, Challenges, and Learning Zone	100
	Dynamic Reteaming	102
	Pairing	105
	Mob Programming (Software Teaming)	108

	Hackathon .....	112
	Open Space .....	113
	Liberating Structures .....	117
	Micro-Facilitation Techniques .....	118
	Collaboration Summary .....	120
<b>8</b>	<b>Leadership and Culture .....</b>	<b>121</b>
	Goals and Challenges .....	122
	What Is an Agile Organization? .....	124
	Introducing Change with Agile Kata .....	126
	Servant Leadership .....	127
	Empowerment and Trust .....	128
	Agile Culture .....	129
	Summary .....	130
<b>Part III</b>	<b>Use Cases .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Retrospectives .....</b>	<b>135</b>
	Types of Retrospective Outcomes .....	136
	Agile Kata as a Parallel Activity to Scrum .....	136
	Challenges and Opportunities .....	137
<b>10</b>	<b>Agile Team Process .....</b>	<b>141</b>
	Timeboxing .....	142
	Artifacts .....	143
	Roles .....	144
	Events .....	144
	Rules .....	145
	Summary .....	147
<b>11</b>	<b>Transformations .....</b>	<b>149</b>
	The Continuous Improvement Approach .....	151
	Getting Started .....	152
	The Process of Transforming .....	153

<b>12 Business Agility</b> .....	<b>155</b>
<b>13 Product Management</b> .....	<b>161</b>
<b>Wrap-Up</b> .....	<b>165</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>169</b>
<b>Index</b> .....	<b>175</b>

# Foreword by Jeff Sutherland

In the ever-evolving landscape of Agile, the need to continuously refine and elevate our practices is paramount. As someone who has spent decades shaping and refining Scrum, I am particularly excited to see the emergence of Agile Kata as a powerful pattern to bridge the gap between the structured Agile frameworks we know today and the dynamic, continuous improvement mindset that is so vital to sustained success.

My journey with Scrum began more than 30 years ago with the simple yet profound idea that small, cross-functional teams could achieve remarkable productivity by focusing on empirical process control and iterative improvement. This idea has grown into a global movement, transforming industries and revolutionizing the way we think about work. Yet, even as Scrum has matured, there has always been a need for methods that drive the mindset of continuous improvement—a mindset that is at the heart of what we aim to achieve with the Agile Kata.

The “First Principles in Scrum,” which I introduced, underline this necessity. By focusing on principles like “Teams That Finish Early Accelerate Faster,” we emphasize the importance of minimizing waste, optimizing flow, and enabling teams to learn and adapt faster than their competitors. The Agile Kata complements these principles by providing a structured approach to embedding continuous improvement into the daily lives of Agile teams, allowing them to tackle challenges with a scientific mindset and a relentless focus on learning.

The importance of this book cannot be overstated. It provides a much-needed pattern for integrating the kata mindset into Agile practices, offering practical insights and real-world examples that demonstrate how this integration can drive both individual and organizational excellence. By doing so, it not only enhances the effectiveness of Agile teams but also ensures that they remain adaptable, resilient, and focused on delivering maximum value in an increasingly complex world.

I had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of continuous improvement firsthand at PatientKeeper, where we adopted early forms of these practices that contributed to a remarkable increase in both employee engagement and organizational performance. These experiences reinforced my belief that the Agile Kata is not just another tool—it is a critical mindset shift that every Agile practitioner should embrace.

As you embark on this journey with Joe Krebs’s *Agile Kata*, I encourage you to approach it with the same curiosity and openness to learning that has fueled the Agile movement from the beginning. This book will challenge you, inspire you, and, most importantly, equip you with the tools and mindset needed to navigate the complexities of modern work with agility and grace.

—Jeff Sutherland  
cocreator of Scrum and Scrum@Scale  
Massachusetts, 2024

# Foreword by Nigel Thurlow

Many organizations have struggled trying to implement a copy/paste approach to “becoming Agile,” which has yielded less-than-satisfactory results. The desire to rapidly implement case-based approaches, where you study one organization’s success and copy what they did, assuming it will work the same way for you, has proven false. This is the domain of big consulting houses—“It worked there so it’ll work here,” typically visualized in glossy PowerPoint decks. Context matters.

As my dear departed friend Ritsuo Shingo said to me many years ago, “You have to find your own way.” Don’t copy.

Why Agile Kata? In my opinion, Agile needs a helping hand to gain a renewed impetus. Kata describes a repeatable system of individual training exercises for practitioners of martial arts. *Toyota Kata* from Mike Rother took that same concept to help practitioners develop problem-solving and continuous improvement and muscle memory. In *Agile Kata*, Joe has taken this a step further by focusing on Agile and combining the practice of two types of Kata defined by Mike Rother.

Most organizations adopt a methodology, conduct training, hire some PDF-wielding “experts,” and sit back to experience suboptimal results. Many “transformations” lack the discipline required to be successful, and most lack leadership engagement and participation at all levels. With Agile Kata, Joe aims to address both of these problems.

Joe isn’t reinventing Agile; instead, he’s giving you a powerful approach that teaches you a scientific thinking approach as described by Mike Rother. Yet don’t be fooled into thinking discipline is not needed; it is! However, Joe breaks this down into simple steps to strengthen your application of the ideas from Agile and iterative software development and provides you with an additional scaffold to aid learning and adoption.

Joe has included some common Agile patterns in this book to bring you Agile Kata. A way to support your adoption and, if you are failing, a way to rescue that adoption. No silver bullets, just commonsense scientific thinking, discipline, and some repeatable routines that will help you and your teams develop simple habits. The result should be a better Agile process, greater agility as innovation is allowed to emerge, and happier team members as they are given the support they so often lack when adopting a change in their way of working.

If you’re involved in complex work, Joe helps you understand ways to know “where you are now” by highlighting the Cynefin framework in a simple and easy-to-understand way—important when defining your current condition. He then guides you on how to move forward knowing what type of environment you are dealing with—essential when setting a target condition. If these are new terms for you then you are in for a treat. Dig in now!

If you are a change management professional, there is much to take away from this book. No one likes forced change. *Agile Kata* provides change agents a way to make change more natural, involving those impacted by the change and enabling them to learn new habits without a forced adoption.

I think you will enjoy this book. I enjoyed reviewing it.

—Nigel Thurlow  
cocreator of The Flow System  
Texas, 2024

# Preface

If you're reading this book, you probably have some familiarity with Agile methods, maybe even a high level of expertise. But perhaps you have less knowledge of kata and have not thought a great deal about how kata and Agile can work together. That is what this book is about.

I am a long-term practitioner and deeply rooted in Agile. I've been helping clients solve their business challenges by adopting Agile processes for more than two decades. I could have stuck with Agile and helped it evolve and perhaps been perfectly content. But I came across a book that got me thinking critically about what I had learned and done with Agile. That book is called *Toyota Kata*<sup>1</sup> by Mike Rother, a title you can find on the bookshelf of many Lean folk. Mike is a Lean thought leader and the coauthor of *Learning to See*,<sup>2</sup> which is a technical book about creating continuous flow and value stream mapping. As I have also experienced in the Agile world, Mike was disappointed with the sustainability of the methods. Build a beautiful, high-functioning house of cards and then watch it collapse. He wanted something more. His conclusion was that what Toyota had that made it work, and what many companies lack, is scientific thinking.

When you approach Agile as a toolkit, you end up with nice-looking artifacts that may have little to do with how the work actually gets done, similar to the way an outdated map doesn't match the scenery you see in front of you. In fact, everyone faces problems in their daily work, and the idea of continuous improvement is to recognize them, try to understand why they occur, and solve them rather than let them fester indefinitely. Along come Lean and Agile, and now you have new tools to throw at the problems. However, the tools themselves do not solve the problems or help you reach your goals. The tools can be helpful if you think a certain way. Mike called that certain way "scientific thinking."

This way of thinking is not much different from the general concept of science. Confront the facts or the actual situation honestly, set clear goals, and experiment your way to the goals by trying out your ideas. This is different from either throwing general tools at the problem or assuming that your general theory about what should work in this situation is true. Humans have all sorts of cognitive biases, and we often assume we know things that we do not. We also are pretty bad at accepting that the world is a complex place filled with uncertainty. We know much less than we do not know.

So Mike Rother came up with a general model of scientific thinking that he called *Improvement Kata*. But the point was not to develop yet another problem-solving model. The point was to develop a general pattern of scientific thinking and then teach it by doing. You don't implement

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1. [MR2009]

2. [MRJS1999]

kata, but you practice it. The term *kata* comes from the martial arts—breaking down complex physical skills into small pieces and then practicing them one by one to master each skill. Put them together, and you can begin to learn how to defend yourself.

Mike Rother's book includes many references to manufacturing and physical objects in the production process. And the book *Toyota Kata* does not mention the word *agile* even once throughout the entire book. Don't let that scare you off. Mike developed these concepts after observing scientific thinking at Toyota, and most of his practice was in manufacturing at first. It may be easier to practice on repetitive, manual processes, but it applies equally well to knowledge work and for teams building products in Agile teams.

Once I saw that kata is a meta-skill and can be of universal use, it quickly became my friend for Agile transformations. In more recent years, I learned through my work and from feedback from other Agile Kata practitioners that the pattern can be applied in many ways to increase agility. It represents *Patterns and Practices for Transformative Organizational Agility*, which is the subtitle of this book.

As you work your way through this book, you will notice two different uses of Improvement Kata. The first is a way of thinking through repeated practice. The goal is to rewire your brain so that you naturally think scientifically when approaching any of life's goals. That does not mean that you pull out the kata and try to follow it exactly, but it becomes a natural way of thinking applied in different ways to different situations.

A second use is to consider the pattern of Improvement Kata as a good model for working toward your goals, like software that helps users achieve their goals with minimum fuss and frustration. This is using the kata like an Agile process that you can integrate with existing Agile methods and thinking or replace the one you're currently using. I often use it this way.

I will go back and forth in usage. Please excuse me for that. I love the idea of practicing scientific thinking, and I love the Agile Kata pattern as a way to strengthen Agile organizations. Mike Rother and his colleague Jeff Liker remind everyone in their publications *Toyota Kata* and *The Toyota Way* that Kata is mainly a way to practice and develop scientific thinking. I will keep using kata in both ways and keep learning and experimenting with other ways so we can increase agility.

Register your copy of *Agile Kata* on the InformIT site for convenient access to updates and/or corrections as they become available. To start the registration process, go to [informit.com/register](http://informit.com/register) and log in or create an account. Enter the product ISBN (9780138118303) and click Submit. If you would like to be notified of exclusive offers on new editions and updates, please check the box to receive email from us.



# Acknowledgments

## Thanks

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A big shout out to all the coaches and trainers who have contributed to the success of my company Incrementor for more than 15 years.

Thank you to my clients for trusting me as an advisor and utilizing my coaching and training services.

Thank you all for being part of my journey that somehow culminated in *Agile Kata*.

## Special Mentions

Mike Rother, thank you for your research and for publishing *Toyota Kata*, the starting point of my kata journey. Thank you also for welcoming me with open arms to the kata community and for giving me the opportunity to meet so many like-minded kata professionals.

Dr. Jeffrey Liker, thank you for being such an important voice in the review and writing process. Thank you for taking so much time to go through chapters, refine, and collaborate on the intersection of Agile and kata. It was a truly unique experience.

Nigel Thurlow, first and foremost, thank you for providing a foreword and seeing the vision of this book. Your practical experiences with the Toyota Production System and Agile processes made this an invaluable and insightful review process with you.

## Feedback

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## **Cover and Illustrations**

Jim Nuttle created the book cover and illustrations. I have collaborated with Jim for several previous projects, including live visual recordings at conferences, educational posters, and even fun stickers. His work is stellar, and I have a feeling that you will enjoy his work, too. Thank you, Jim.

## **Publishing and Editorial Team**

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# About the Author

**Joe (Jochen) Krebs** ([www.joekrebs.com](http://www.joekrebs.com)) is a German-American computer scientist, consultant, and entrepreneur. As the founder of Incrementor, an Agile consultancy, Joe has collaborated with hundreds of companies across various industries, driving significant improvements in their Agile practices. His global client list includes start-ups and Fortune 500 companies alike. Joe is a community builder, podcast host, speaker, and author. He lives in Westchester, near New York City.

In conjunction with *Agile Kata*, Joe has established Agile Kata Pro ([www.agilekata.pro](http://www.agilekata.pro)), where you can find valuable resources, courses, and tools for your professional Agile Kata journey.

# Introduction

Agile Kata is new. Both topics individually, Agile and kata, are not. They have long histories on their own. They have proven themselves time and again and their communities are strong. Both believe in similar things. My hope is to connect them, and perhaps many other Agile professionals will have an aha moment similar to what I experienced when I began moving the puzzle pieces closer together.

In recent years, I have seen a burst of new fresh ideas flooding the Agile community. At the time of writing this book, I noticed a positive trend and energy toward organizational design, enterprise and team coaching, business agility, agile leadership, scaling, and portfolio management. There was also an appetite to learn ways to improve the process of an Agile team. The beautiful thing is that Agile Kata can help you get started with all of these topics. And if you've already started with one of them, Agile Kata can help you continuously improve it.

Agile Kata is *a* universal pattern, not *the* universal pattern. I can't predict the future. No one can. But from what I can tell about recent trends, businesses have adapted to leaner and flatter hierarchies. Some companies have established democratic, self-managed workplaces with great success. Employees entering the job market are looking for purpose, learning, and growth as a person—and, of course, reward. A fail fast and learn attitude, courage for experimentation, and closing feedback loops with stakeholders and customers is becoming the new norm everywhere. All of these trends are deeply anchored in Agile and scientific thinking and are directly linked to Agile Kata, which can enable these.

## Purpose, Background, and Goals

Back in the mid-1990s, when I developed software in Smalltalk, I had the chance to experiment with a series of processes that were fundamentally different from what was commonly used. I used the Rational Unified Process (RUP), Ivar Jacobson's use-case-driven approach, and Extreme Programming (XP). Compared to today, this pre-Agile-Manifesto period before 2001 truly felt like a groundbreaking, revolutionary era. Some might have referred to us as a bunch of corporate rebels. Even though I was at the beginning of my career, I already had firsthand experience with the flaws of waterfall. I felt anxious to try something new, but we didn't have the data and evidence yet to be sure that new ways of working would revolutionize the future. In hindsight, this was a bold move to branch off into a niche, especially because I was so early in my career.

The Agile Manifesto did a wonderful job bringing the various processes and frameworks together under one umbrella by giving it a name, values, and a set of principles. I vividly remember taking a trip to Newton, Massachusetts, shortly after the Agile Manifesto was released because news made it to me in New York City that "a guy" named Jeff Sutherland would give a

training on Scrum. I felt that I had to be part of that session, especially after I read *Agile Software Development with Scrum* (Pearson),<sup>1</sup> which was fresh off the press. So I made my way up toward Boston...

The training took place in an improvised back room at PatientKeeper, where Jeff worked at that time. It was a small class, and I felt like an intruder because a regular workday unfolded next to us while we were learning about Scrum. Because of the circumstances where Scrum was being taught, it felt like a well-kept secret. That is what moonshiners during prohibition must have felt like.

When I reflect on the past, I recognize that moments like that were important stepping stones in my career. My background in various Agile processes eventually led to creating my own consultancy: Incrementor in New York. Just a few years after that trip to Boston, I had the chance to deliver scrum trainings alongside Jeff and Ken.

A similar eye-opening moment happened in the late 2010s, when the early indicators for successful Agile transformations were dismal. By looking closer at the struggles and failures of Agile transformations, it was quite noticeable that the Agile mindset we used with teams got lost when applied to the transformation process. Questions from clients, such as, “What is the process of introducing Scrum to my organization?” did not generate good answers. It felt ironic that organizations fell back into waterfall behavior when introducing Agile as their new DNA in the organization. I noticed “waves” of work and heard words like *roll-out* and *complete* used in the context of Agile transformations. These transformations were often treated as projects or as single-improvement initiatives, like an item on a corporate checklist.

The grassroots movement of Agile in the early days—where teams worked, learned, and continuously refined their process over time—seemed to have ended. Agile transformations now showed signs of top-down, command-and-control leadership. Some companies even tried to standardize their organization and aimed for \_\_\_\_ (fill in the Agile process flavor of your choice) conformity. Those organizations had entirely missed the idea of what Agile was all about.

In 2017, when I began reading *Toyota Kata* (McGraw Hill) by Mike Rother, I had this instant feeling that scientific thinking trained by kata and continuous improvement could be of tremendous value for the Agile community. Even though Rother uses Toyota as a vehicle (no pun intended) to bring that pattern to surface, it’s really not about Toyota and cars at all. Once I saw that the kata is a meta skill and can be of universal use, it became my friend for Agile transformations and so much more. Let’s explore this further.

During the hype of Agile transformations, I noticed an abundance of promises made by companies selling shiny Agile transformation playbooks. Those start-to-finish processes were often just a fancy name for an old-school waterfall process that made the planned transformation look logical, safe, and easy to buy in. Many learned the hard way that this is far from reality. I know of several large companies that had several unsuccessful transformations, until they decided to

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1. [KSMB2001]

give up. Maybe it is time to question the playbooks and the approaches instead of questioning the ability of an organization to change. I would even argue that every company can change. The question instead is: How fast can they change?

The difference between the traditional approach and kata is also captured in the well-known saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Just handing an organization a blueprint and sending a constant stimulus from the outside to become more agile is clearly not enough. On the other hand, Toyota Kata is that meta skill that teaches an organization to learn how to fish. As a matter of fact, it teaches how to fish and continuously improve your fishing skills. Learning is continuous.

But when I began increasing agility this way, I remembered the quote by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Agility is the resiliency in an organization to make better, more rapid decisions in response to feedback with the purpose of building better products and services. To stay relevant as a for-profit company, reading the market trends and reacting accordingly is extremely important. The successful companies are really good at this.

Agile Kata extends Toyota Kata in ways to embrace and live by Agile values and principles from day one. Enabling an Agile culture by adopting a new leadership style increases collaborating skills in self-organized, autonomous teams. It also requires an upgrade of coaching skills and ways of measuring the success of our products and the process.

In the beginning, my goals were very narrow. I wanted to help clients in their transformation journey. We tested kata ideas and experimented in various settings. The feedback was positive, and we got encouragement to continue. We created the Agile Transformation Kata as the first attempt to formalize the pattern and name it. Then we dropped the word *transformation* after we learned about many additional scenarios that went way beyond the initial transformation need.

I hope this book will give you plenty of new ideas to help increase agility. The ideas in it will challenge the ways things currently work in your organization and help you consider how using Agile Kata can make it a better place. Considering that agile organizations are more flexible and adaptable and therefore more competitive, I believe that Agile Kata can be of tremendous value for your company or client. Another hope, which might sound very ambitious and audacious, is that Agile Kata can help your organization and the Agile community as a whole to break through stalemate situations to reach a higher level of agility.

The goal of the book is neither a full introduction to kata nor to Agile nor a resource to make you an expert on either topic. It would be a false expectation to think something so big could be covered in only a couple hundred pages or to expect that you can develop skills only by reading. However, this book should get you off the ground.

If I have left out a reference to your favorite Lean, Agile, or kata book, it doesn't mean that it's not relevant in the context of Agile Kata. It's tough for an author to find a balance between the right amount of relevant information and paralyzing the reader through information overload. Again, I hope I have kept the content focused so that you can navigate the topic effectively.

This book is relatively short by design. It may take you only a few days to read through the material. The Agile Kata approach is very lightweight, just like other Agile processes, and the length of this book carries that spirit. However, keep in mind that lightweight does not necessarily mean that it is also easy to do.

You will certainly encounter challenges when you apply Agile Kata within your environment. Over time, though, if you practice it deliberately, it will become second nature.

My goal with this book is to build a solid bridge between kata and Agile—a bridge that should make you feel comfortable to cross in either direction. To do this, I chose a mix of theory, examples, and use cases that should give you plenty of confidence to introduce Agile Kata to your organization. I'm curious to hear about your success stories, but if you notice that it is not working the way you expect, please let me know, too. To keep this process interactive, I have reserved [www.joekrebs.com/agile-kata-book](http://www.joekrebs.com/agile-kata-book), where you can submit any feedback about the content of the book. For training-, certification-, and community-related inquiries, please visit [www.agilekata.pro](http://www.agilekata.pro), a hub created for Agile Kata professionals. For book content and feedback, please visit [joekrebs.com/agile-kata-book](http://joekrebs.com/agile-kata-book).

## Who Should Read this Book?

The kata by itself is a universal pattern for any kind of improvement, and Part I could be especially beneficial for *anyone* who wants to improve any situation, Agile or not.

Parts II and III connect the kata with Agile ways of working. For example, if you are in the role of an Agile coach, scrum master, project manager, or change agent whose goal is to increase agility, all three parts of this book should give you fresh new ideas and tools to improve. Because Agile Kata is a universal pattern that touches potentially any type of team, testers, developers, architects, and user-interface designers can get some fresh new ideas for working together as well—in that case, as an IT team.

If you are an executive or leader, Agile Kata can give you new ideas for implementing Agile strategies, effecting cultural change, and transforming organizational design. You may also consider using Agile Kata to provide a new way of working with your peers or teams.

If you are a member of a project management office or portfolio management team, Agile Kata can spark new ideas and create additional viewpoints using experimentation, goals, or targets.

Change agents looking for a new change-management process that introduces more agility to their organization will hopefully find new inspiration in Agile Kata.

Last but not least, members of a product management team may use Agile Kata for designing new ways to interact with their stakeholders and build product visions and product strategies. They may even use Agile Kata for building the actual product. Agile Kata is as universal as it is exciting.

Whatever your motivations are when you decided to read about this topic, I hope you find it refreshingly new and that you gain a new perspective. If you find more success as a result of using the kata, I would be thrilled to know. Beware: Applying Agile Kata is highly addictive and may captivate you beyond reading this book. (At least that is what happened to me when I started my journey.)

## How This Book Is Organized

I can't wait to show you what kata are all about and how kata and Agile complement each other. Even more importantly, I want to show you what you can do with the kata day by day. You will notice how these three goals of the book map directly to the table of contents.

Part I provides you with a foundation and introduction to kata and scientific thinking and explains what makes kata in general so unique. You will see that a mindset of scientific thinking can be very different compared to well-established Agile processes and frameworks. If you are contemplating using kata outside the boundaries of Agile, Part I is your companion. If you're already familiar with kata, you may skim through this part of the book, although I think I offer a perspective that appeals to Agile practitioners and may be new to you. The main goal of Part I is to set the stage for Part II and eventually Part III.

After the foundation of the kata is laid in Part I, we explore how Agile ways of working can extend the basic form of the kata. Part II takes important Agile topics and links those to the kata: coaching, culture, collaboration, measuring value, and leadership, to name a few and give you food for thought and context. You can see each topic as an extension point to the original basic kata form that's covered in Part I. At the end of Part II, you will have a better understanding of Agile Kata.

While you are reading through the first two parts of the book, you will probably generate tons of wonderful ideas for improving agility in your team or organization as a whole. In my experience since I began working with Agile Kata, the sky is truly the limit. You can go as far as your creativity and practice will take you.

After reading Part II, you might feel ready and impatient to get started. But before you do that, check out Part III, where I share a set of common use cases. These use cases may validate some of the ideas you generate while reading through Parts I and II. By sharing these vastly different but common use cases for Agile practitioners, I hope I inspire you to identify Agile Kata opportunities. I'm confident that at least one of the use cases will stand out as your personal starting point with Agile Kata. But I wouldn't be surprised if you find more than one use case that connects well with



what you would like to improve within your team or organization. In this case you will face the difficult choice of which to start with—which is not a bad problem to have.

I used the word *common* rather than *typical* to describe the use cases in Part III. Although the words seem to be interchangeable, there are minor differences. In the complex and exciting world that we live in, the word *common* implies something that is generally encountered in various situations. *Typical*, on the other hand, refers to something that is expected to happen; it's more of a standard. The difference is nuanced, but it's important when you work through the scenarios during Part III. When navigating the unknown with scientific thinking and Agile Kata, be prepared to be surprised. Instead of applying each use case as-is, like an exact recipe, the use cases should serve you only as a starting point.

The point of Agile Kata is not to provide a set of generic solutions to generic problems. Every organization or team has unique characteristics and parameters, and every client solution is unique as well. Thus, you're working to achieve the goals of your products for your users based on the experiences and knowledge of your team.

The main benefit of the use cases is to stimulate some ideas about where Agile Kata might be useful and how it can be used. Although every situation is unique, I hope you will find inspiration in Part III to start trying this new pattern.

Throughout the book, you will discover the occasional links to additional resources, such as activities or material you might find useful when applying Agile Kata. In addition, each chapter ends with a set of reflection questions to let the topic sink in a little more.

## Challenges

Writer's block is defined as, "The inability to begin or continue writing for reasons other than a lack of basic skill or commitment."<sup>2</sup> Many writers, including myself, have encountered writer's block before, but if you use Gerry Weinberg's fieldstone method,<sup>3</sup> writer's block is almost a thing of the past. *Almost...*

There are still unforeseen events that can cause a book project that has lasted for almost two years to derail at any given time. In my case, it was a death in the family, a severe weather impact in Florida, and a lost passport that prevented me from traveling internationally for months. Situations like this make it hard to get back into the groove of writing again. Ironically, many Agile initiatives that get stuck somewhere in their journey have similarities to writer's block for an author. A new fieldstone, or kata, unblocked me and kept me going.

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2. [MR2009]

3. [GW2005]

Positive events can also have an impact on the writing process. During a project like this, the life of a consultant continues, and clients were asking for Agile Kata training and coaching services. Conference organizers began inquiring about Agile Kata presentations, which I gladly accepted to keep spreading the word. The appetite for Agile Kata also continued in the form of webinars, user group events, and podcasts. These events made it easy to transition back to writing and helped me to see opportunities for Agile Kata from even more angles.

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# Index

“The 5 Trademarks of Agile Organizations,” 125  
15% Solutions, 118  
33 Liberating Structures  
    15% Solutions, 118  
    Ecocycle Planning, 118  
    Min-Spec, 118  
    Open Space, 116  
    Troika Consulting, 118  
    Wicked Questions, 118

## A

A2I (Ability to Innovate), 74–75  
accountability, 81  
achieve-by dates, 31, 144  
action, 37–38  
Action Learning Sets, 119  
“The Adaptable Organization” (Deloitte), 125  
agile, definition, 54  
Agile Alliance code of ethical conduct, 95  
Agile Coaching Competency Framework  
    Agile-Lean Practitioner, 83  
    business mastery, 83

    facilitating, 83  
    mentoring, 83  
    professional coaching, 83  
    teaching, 83  
    technical mastery, 83  
    transformation mastery, 83  
Agile Coaching Growth Wheel, 84  
    continuous improvement, 88  
    scientific thinking, 88  
Agile Kata  
    Agile Manifesto, connecting, 63–64  
    parallel to Scrum, 136–139  
    planning and, 17  
    as team process, 141–147  
    as way of doing Agile, 49  
Agile Manifesto, 1–2, 55–58  
    4 values, 55  
    12 principles, 56  
    Agile Kata, connecting, 63–64  
    spider diagram, 59  
    values and principles, 53, 60–61  
Agile movement, 2–3

Agile organizations, 124  
 “The Adaptable Organization” (Deloitte), 125  
 Deloitte’s criteria, 125  
 “The 5 Trademarks of Agile Organizations,”  
 125  
*Agile Software with Scrum* (Sutherland), 2  
 Agile Transformation Kata, 3  
 Agile values and principles, 53  
 Agile-Lean Practitioner, Agile Coaching  
 Competency Framework, 83  
 agility as continuous improvement, 57  
 AI (artificial intelligence), 64, 166  
 alignment meetings, 109  
 artifacts, 143–144  
 automated solutions, 69–70

## B

---

blind spots, 14–15  
 build trap, 162  
 built-in instability, 146  
 business agility, 155  
   Cynefin framework and, 157  
   decision-making, 156, 158  
   finance and, 158  
   legal and, 158  
   procurement and, 158  
   product portfolio and, 158  
   reactive *versus* proactive approach, 156  
 business mastery, Agile Coaching Competency  
 Framework, 83

## C

---

career skills, 81  
 challenges. *See* goals/challenges

chaotic situations, 17  
 coaches/coaching, 49–50, 79–80, 144. *See also*  
 learning to learn; mentoring  
   Agile Coaching Competency Framework,  
   83–85  
   Agile Coaching Growth Wheel, 83–85, 88  
   Agile Kata and, 88–89  
   change and, 87–88, 94–95  
   contract, 96  
   ethics, 95  
   non-business, 80–81  
   professional, 89–91  
   role of, 85–89  
   storyboards and, 40  
   teaching, 93  
 Coaching Kata, 43–44, 49–50  
   learners and, 44–45  
   questions, 89–91  
   second coach, 46–47  
   team effectiveness and, 83  
 collaboration, 81, 99, 113–116  
   4Cs, 37  
   ensemble programming, 108  
   hackathons, 112–113  
   Liberating Structures and, 117  
   mob programming, 108–111  
   pairing, 104, 105–108  
   reteaming, dynamic, 102–105  
   software teaming, 108–111  
 comfort zone, 100–101  
 communication  
   4Cs, 37  
   digital literacy and, 81  
 conditions  
   current, 27–29  
   target, 29–31

continuous improvement, 19–22

Agile Coaching Growth Wheel, 88

agility as, 57

business agility and, 156

experimentation and, 153

IT industry and, 166

leadership and, 126

organizational fitness and, 157

product development rhythm, 136

sprint retrospectives and, 137

transformations and, 151–152

creativity, 81

4C's, 37

control and, 146

hack and, 112

Liberating Structures and, 117

OpenSpace and, 115, 116

teams and, 33, 129

critical thinking skills, 81, 82

4C's, 37

coaching and, 44

Wicked Questions, 118

cross-cultural skills, 81

cultural shifts, coaching and, 87

culture, 129–130

decision-making and, 156

culture of kata, 20–23

current knowledge threshold, 35

cycle time, 68

Cynefin framework, 17–18, 142

business agility and, 157

cynicism, 19

## D

daily scrum, 86

decision-making

Agile organizations, 125

decentralized, 158

empowerment and, 129

organizational culture and, 156

design thinking, 163

development

overlapping development phases, 146

value and, 66

digital literacy skills, 81

directions, 26–27. *See also* goals/challenges

Dutch Reach, 13–14, 25

Dynamic Facilitation, 119

dynamic organizations, 37

dynamic people model, 125

dynamic reteaming, 102–105

## E

EBM (evidence-based management), 73

A2I (Ability to Innovate), 74–75

Agile Kata and, 75–76

T2M (time to market), 74

value, 75

Ecocycle Planning, 118

education quality, 81

empowerment, leadership and, 128–129

ensemble programming, 108

ethics, coaching, 95

events, 144–145

Experiment Toward the Target Condition, 31–35,  
39–41

## experimentation

- 15% Solutions and, 118
- experiment record, 39
- habits and, 14–16
- learning from, 33–34
- metrics, 67
- target condition, 22, 31–32

**F**

## facilitation

- Action Learning Sets, 119
- Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
- Dynamic Facilitation, 119
- micro-facilitation, 118–119
- Mind-mapping, 119
- Scenario Planning, 119
- Solutions Focus Brief Theory, 119
- storyboards, 40

flexibility, change and, 126

focus, change and, 126

future, 166

**G**

GenAI, 64, 166

## goals/challenges, 16

- business challenge, 58–59
- defining, 124
- dynamic reteaming, 104–105
- experimenting and, 116
- Improvement Kata, 123
- OKR (objectives and key results), 76
- sprint retrospectives, 137–139
- storyboards, 39, 44
- timeframe, 26–27

Grasp the Current Condition, 27–29

green IT, 166

growth mindset, 93

growth zone, 36

**H**

## habits, 12–13

- coaching and, 89
- culture changes and, 63
- Cynefin framework and, 17
- experimentation and, 14–16
- repetition and, 13–14
- team stagnation and, 105

hackathons, 112–113

hybrid workspaces, 166

**I**

ICF (International Coaching Federation), 80–81, 96

improvement, continuous (*See* continuous improvement)

## Improvement Kata, 25

- challenges, defining, 123
- Establish Next Target Condition, 29–31
- Experiment Toward the Target Condition, 31–41
- goals/challenges, 26–27
- stepping sequence, 38
- Understand the Direction and Challenge, 26–27

information, digital literacy and, 81

initiative, 81

leaders and, 129

initiatives, 19

code of ethics, 95

instability, built-in, 146  
iterations, 135, 144–145. *See also* sprints  
    non-timeboxed, 144  
    timeboxing and, 142–143  
iterative improvement, storyboards, 40

## J

---

Jacobson, Ivar, 1  
Jira, 72  
joy, 56

## K

---

Kanban, 21, 39  
    iterations, 143  
    storyboards, 40  
    timeboxing, 139  
kata, 9, 11–12, 49  
    coach/learner relationships, 45–47  
    mob programming and, 110  
    pairing and, 107–108  
    as pattern, 94  
    practices, 99–100  
    starter questions, 45  
    storyboards and, 113  
katalog, 143  
knowledge sharing, 81

## L

---

lead time, 68  
leadership, 121–122  
    change initiation, 126  
    empowerment and, 128–129  
    servant leadership, 127–128

    skills, 126–127  
    SpaceX, 127–128  
    storyboards and, 41  
    team direction, 122–123  
    Tesla, 127–128  
    transition and, 130  
    trust and, 128–129  
Lean Coffee, 118–119  
learners  
    Coaching Kata and, 44–45  
    panic zone, 100  
learning, 81, 165  
    Action Learning Sets, 119  
    Agile organizations, 125  
    learning and innovation skills, 81  
    multilearning, 146  
    organizational transfer of, 146–147  
    pairing and, 106  
    skills, 81  
learning edge, 35, 36  
learning to learn, 81–83  
learning zone, 36, 100, 101, 165  
    patterns and, 142  
Liberating Structures, 117–118. *See also* 33  
    Liberating Structures  
life skills, 81

## M

---

managers  
    metrics for, 66–67  
    storyboards and, 41  
The Manifesto for Agile Software Development.  
    *See* Agile Manifesto  
manual solutions, 69–70  
martial arts, kata description, 9



media, digital literacy and, 81

mentoring, 91
 

- Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
- conversation, 92

meta-skills, 94

metrics
 

- management and, 66–67
- teams and, 67–68

micro-facilitation, 118–119

micro-skills, 79

Mind-mapping, 119

mindset, 53
 

- change and, 126
- coaching and, 87
- growth mindset, 93

Min-Spec, 118

mob programming, 108–111

model adoption, 20–22

*Moving Beyond Icebreakers* (Pollack), 119

MVP (minimum viable product), 163

## N

---

Nadella, Satya, 93

next-generation enabling technology, 125

Nonaka, Ikujiro, 145

North Star, 125

## O

---

Ohno, Taiichi, 45

OJD (on-the-job development), 45

OKR (objectives and key results) framework, 76–77

Open Space, 100, 113–116

operational contracts, 30

org chart, servant leadership, 127

organization types
 

- dynamic, 37
- zombie, 36

organizational transfer of learning, 146–147

overlapping development phases, 146

Owen, Harrison, 113

## P

---

pairing, collaboration and, 104, 105
 

- pair stair, 107

panic zone, 100, 101

patterns
 

- development phases and, 146
- hackathons and, 113
- kata as, 94–95
- learning zone and, 142
- transformations and, 152–153

PCE (Process Cycle Efficiency), 72

permanence of situation, 17

Perri, Melissa, 162, 163

PMO (project management office), 149–150

Pollack, Stanley, *Moving Beyond Icebreakers*, 119

Power BI, 72

practices, 99–100

proactive approach, 156

problem-solving skills, 81

Process Cycle Efficiency (PCE), 72

product backlog, 143–144, 162

product goals, 124

Product Kata, 163–164

product management, 161
 

- design thinking, 163
- populating backlog, 162

- product owners, 162
- Stage Gate process, 163
- sunsetting, 161
- professional coaching, 89
  - Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
  - coaching arc, 89–90
- project management office (PMO), 149–150
- purpose, change and, 126

## Q

- quantum computing, 166
- questions, 16
  - Coaching Kata, 89–90

## R

- radar chart, 59–60
- reactive approach, 156
- reformation, teams, 102–105
- relationships, change and, 126
- reteaming, 102–105
- retrospectives, 135. *See also* sprint retrospectives
  - sprint retrospectives, 135–137
- Rising, Linda, 81
- roles, 144
- Rother, Mike, *Toyota Kata*, 2
- rules, 145–146
- RUP (Rational Unified Process), 1

## S

- Scenario Planning, 119
- Schwaber, Ken, 135

- scientific thinking, 15, 50
  - Agile Coaching Growth Wheel, 88
  - culture of, 32
  - Establish Next Target Condition, 29–31
  - experiments, 34
  - exploration, 82
  - Grasp Current Condition, 27–29
  - learning to learn, 82
  - OKR (objectives and key results) and, 76
  - Open Space and, 116
  - Understand the Direction and Challenge, 26–27
- Scrum, 1–2
  - backlog refinement meeting, 142
  - daily scrum, 86, 142
  - estimation, 142
  - product backlog (artifact), 142
  - product goals, 124
  - shock therapy, introduction, 54
  - sprint (timebox), 142
  - user stories, 142
- Scrum Guide, 135
- scrum master, 85–86, 142
  - scrum teams and, 136
- self-direction, 81
- self-organizing project teams, 146
- servant leadership, org chart, 127
- silent grouping, 119
- skills, 81
  - meta-skills, 94
  - micro-skills, 79
- Snowden, David, 17
- software, terminology, 58
- software teaming, 108–111
- Solutions Focus Brief Theory, 119
- spider diagram, 59–60

sports coach, 80

sprint retrospectives
 

- challenges, 137–139
- continuous improvement and, 137
- outcomes, 136

sprints, 135, 144–145. *See also* iterations

Stage Gate process of product management, 163

stakeholders, storyboards and, 41

stand-ups, 86

starter kata, 40

storyboarding, 39, 63
 

- achieve-by dates, 144
- coaches/coaching and, 40
- facilitation, 40
- goals/challenges, 39
- hackathons, 113
- iterative improvement, 40
- Kanban, 40
- leadership and, 41
- managers and, 41
- starter kata, 40
- transparency, 40
- visualization, 40

subject matter experts, storyboards and, 41

subtle control, 146

sunsetting, product management, 161

*The Surprising Power of Liberating Structures*, 117.  
*See also* 33 Liberating Structures

sustainability, 166

Sutherland, Jeff, 1–2, 135
 

- Agile Software with Scrum*, 2

## T

T2M (time to market), 74

Takeuchi, Hirotaka, 145

target conditions, 29–31, 33

teaching
 

- Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
- coaching and, 93

team canvas, 96

team process, 141
 

- artifacts, 143–144
- built-in instability, 146
- coaches, 144
- cross-functionality, 144
- events, 144–145
- iterations, 144–145
- katalog, 143
- multilearning, 146
- organizational transfer of learning, 146–147
- overlapping development phases, 146
- product backlog, 143–144
- reformation, 102–105
- roles, 144
- Scrum, 142
- self-organizing project teams, 146
- sprints, 144–145
- subtle control, 146
- teams, 144
- timeboxing, 142–143

teams, 144
 

- Agile, 123
- Coaching Kata and, 83
- collaboration, dynamic reteaming, 102–105
- cross-functionality, 144
- direction, 122–123
- empowered, 125
- evolution, 103–104

- forming, 104
- kata pattern and, 49
- leadership, 122–123
- metrics for, 67–68
- mob programming, 108–111
- pairing, 104
- rules, 145–146
- self-organizing, 146
- software teaming, 108–111
- transience, 103–105
- technical mastery, Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
- thinking models, 20
- timeboxing, 136
  - iterations, 142–143, 144
  - team process, 142–143
- timeframes, goals/challenges, 26–27
- Toyota Kata, 2–3, 20–21, 122
- Toyota Kata* (Rother), 2, 97
- traffic light indicators, 61–63
- transformation mastery, Agile Coaching Competency Framework, 83
- transformations, 149
  - commonsense questions, 153
  - continuous improvement approach, 151–152
  - patterns and, 152–153
  - process, 153–154
- transitioning
  - leadership and, 130
  - timeboxing and, 142–143
- transparency, storyboards, 40
- Troika Consulting, 118
- trust, leadership and, 128–129

## U

---

- uncertainty, 16–18, 35
- Understand the Direction and Challenge, 26–27
- unpredictability, 35

## V

---

- value, 65
  - automated solutions, 69–70
  - cycle time, 68
  - defining, 50
  - development and, 66
  - EBM (evidence-based management), 73–76
  - external control and, 66
  - lead time, 68
  - learning, 66
  - manual solutions, 69–70
  - metrics, 66–68
  - OKR (objectives and key results) framework, 76–77
  - performance, 66
  - types, 70–72
- vision, 37–38
- visualization, storyboards, 40

## W

---

- Wait column, 72
- way of doing, 49
- Weltanschauung, 53
- Wicked Questions, 118
- wikis, 81

## **X-Y-Z**

---

XP (Extreme Programming), 1, 135, 139

zombie organizations, 36

zone of unpredictability and uncertainty, 35

Zuill, Woody, 108